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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000211

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM UNMIK YI

SUBJECT: AHTISAARI'S KOSOVO VISIT: PROGRESS ON
DECENTRALIZATION BEFORE STATUS

Classified By: Philip S. Goldberg for Reasons 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The second visit to Kosovo of Martti Ahtisaari, UN Special Envoy for Kosovo Final Status Talks, focused on creating an improved political situation for Kosovo's minority populations. He demanded progress on property rights, prosecution of crimes against Kosovo Serbs, and concrete implementation of elements of decentralization. He publicly stated he believed the February 20-21 decentralization meeting in Vienna had been a "good start," and urged Kosovo's leaders to be continuously engaged on both central and local levels and in future Vienna meetings on cultural and religious heritage, minority rights and the economy. The Kosovo government's public reaction to Ahtisaari's visit was positive. Ahtisaari's messages to Pristina-based representatives of the Contact Group focused on accelerating on-the-ground progress from a technical standpoint. END SUMMARY.

MESSAGE TO PISG: PROGRESS ON "STATUS-NEUTRAL" ISSUES

¶2. (C) Martti Ahtisaari's message to Kosovo Albanian leaders during his March 1-3 visit to Kosovo called for immediate action and further concessions by Pristina on decentralization before status is discussed. On March 1, the first day of his visit, Ahtisaari met with the members of the Kosovo Albanian final status negotiating team and held a private meeting with newly-elected Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu. Ahtisaari later told Contact Group heads of office that he had urged team members to speed up the process of creating a better political situation for Kosovo's minority populations on concrete issues such as property rights, crimes against Serbs (he said he asked UNMIK to investigate a case brought to his attention during a meeting with Kosovo Serb municipal presidents), and implementation of technical aspects of decentralization realizable in the short-term, such as the drafting of legislation on local elections, local self-government and local finance. Cultural heritage and church property can also be addressed before status is determined, he said. In a local television interview aired on March 4, he said that if the PISG does not have the capacity to address these issues, "the international community is here to assist" and to find areas of common ground for compromise. "Negotiation is compromise," he added.

¶13. (C) Ahtisaari told Contact Group reps on March 3 that he viewed positively recent changes in the Kosovo government: the election of President Fatmir Sejdiu following President Ibrahim Rugova's death on January 21, and the replacement of Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi with Kosovo Protection Corps commander General Agim Ceku. He said the new government must move quickly if it is to "finish the (final status) process in 2006."

"BOTTOM UP" APPROACH ON DECENTRALIZATION

¶14. (C) Ahtisaari's second day in Kosovo focused on gathering opinions on technical aspects of decentralization in meetings with political and municipal representatives from Kosovo's majority-Serb communities, members of Kosovo's non-Serb minority communities, a Kosovo women's group, and representatives of the ethnic Albanian Association of Kosovo Municipalities. He told the Contact Group reps that, during a meeting in Lipljan with the mayors of Kosovo's five Serb-majority municipalities, he had pushed minority participation in status efforts and in Kosovo political structures. He said he was encouraged by efforts being made to improve relations among minority communities, but told the press that "a lot more needs to be done" and that leaders of all communities to be generous in recognition that "changing people's attitudes doesn't cost a penny." This should be done, he said, not because the international community is asking for it, but because it is in the interest of all people in Kosovo. Zubin Potok (Serb majority) Mayor Slavisa Ristic told the press that granting of a Serb request for local autonomy in the justice and policing sectors would "solve the problem of (Serb) existence" and lack of freedom of movement.

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FUTURE REDUCED INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE

¶15. (C) Ahtisaari told the Contact Group reps that he favored a lighter international presence in Kosovo than has been proposed in European capitals. Likening Kosovo to a 30-year-old bachelor still living with his mother, he said, "It's time to live with more responsibility." He added that he found it difficult to conceptualize how Kosovo could be left without some sort of post-status armed force, be it called a gendarmerie, a national guard or an army. "How will they secure a society without an organized force?" he asked, and "how will they enter Euro-Atlantic structures?" To Kosovars, he said in a half-hour March 4 televised local interview that he hoped that in five years there will be a Balkan "class" joining Euro-Atlantic structures such as the Partnership for Peace. In his departing March 3 press conference, Ahtisaari confirmed that the second meeting on decentralization will be held in Vienna on March 17, and he encouraged leaders to look to the future, instead of "dwelling" on the past.

¶16. (SBU) This message is cleared in its entirety for release to UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari.

GOLDBERG